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RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH  
DE RUEHHI #1382/01 2180754  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 060754Z AUG 07  
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6001  
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 3468  
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 001382

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/FOREIGN  
MINISTER KHIEM

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(U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet  
posting.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During the August 2 farewell lunch he hosted for Ambassador and Mrs. Marine, Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem noted the many achievements in U.S.-Vietnam relations during the Ambassador's tenure. The Ambassador agreed that improvements had been made in many areas, but pushed for greater progress on areas of ongoing concern such as human rights and legal and economic reform as well as specific issues including the Peace Corps, a New Embassy Compound, and a possible new consulate in Danang. DPM Khiem said his ministry would seek to be helpful in addressing these issues. Turning to Vietnam's future role as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, DPM Khiem declared that the GVN agrees with the position of the United States on many of the key issues facing the UNSC. End Summary.

#### SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS, NEXT STEPS

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¶2. (SBU) Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem hosted a farewell lunch for Ambassador and Mrs. Marine on August 2. DPM Khiem cited the great progress that has been made in U.S.-Vietnam relations during the Ambassador's tenure, notably the granting of PNTR to Vietnam and the removal of Vietnam from the Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) list. He also highlighted the signing of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the United States in June 2007. The Ambassador agreed that the "economic side of the relationship" is going well, although the United States would like to see an improved balance of trade. There are significant achievements, the Ambassador said, but they are only the beginning. The United States supports a strong, vibrant, and independent Vietnam as a key to peace and security in the region, he emphasized.

¶3. (SBU) There are many areas where we can work together, including programs to deepen democracy, expand the rule of law and improve the quality of governance, the Ambassador told DPM Khiem. We are encouraged that DPM Khiem responded positively to the March letter from Senator Patrick Leahy to President Triet in this connection, and now is the time to transform that willingness and commitment into concrete actions.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS: CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE, SPECIFIC CASES

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¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that, during his recent visit to

Washington, President Nguyen Minh Triet made the point that we must continue our dialogue on human rights. We agree, the Ambassador said, and hope to address human rights and related issues in ways that are effective. As President Bush made clear, friends of the United States must understand that we have a principled commitment to call for the recognition and adherence to human rights. The DPM noted President Triet was frank in his discussion of the issue with President Bush, and the Ambassador agreed that, while they did not come to a full agreement on the issue, their frank exchange of views was beneficial.

15. (SBU) The Ambassador observed that Vietnam and the United States have different views on press freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. The Ambassador noted he recently sent a letter to Vice Foreign Minister Le Van Bang regarding two groups of people of interest to the United States: prisoners convinced of "crimes" related to their peaceful expression of political views who are eligible for amnesty and another group who have been detained for extended periods without being charged. The laws that these individuals have been charged with violating are "not appropriate for the Vietnam of today," said the Ambassador, and we hope the GVN will release these individuals soon.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador also raised four cases of particular concern by name: Catholic priest Nguyen Van Ly, two lawyers: Nguye Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan, and a journalist, Ms. Tran Khai Thanh Thuy. Ly, Dai and Nhan have been tried and sentenced to long prison terms for actions that we see as expressions of their basic human rights, the Ambassador said. We urge the GVN to release them as soon as possible, in accordance with Vietnamese law.

18. (SBU) Ms. Thuy's "crime" was postings on the internet calling for greater freedom in Vietnam. We understand she has been held without charge since April, and we hope she can be treated leniently under Vietnamese law. Neither she nor any of the other individuals whose cases we have raised have called for violence; they have only advocated political change, which is something we believe people should be allowed to do, the Ambassador stressed.

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19. (SBU) Those on the lists passed to the MFA are not necessarily the high-profile Vietnamese prisoners who attract attention around the world, the Ambassador noted. Even for those who are not eligible for amnesty, allowing families and lawyers to visit them freely is both the right thing to do and would lead to a boost to Vietnam's image. The Ambassador also asked Khiem to help arrange access by U.S. Embassy staff to prisoners of concern, including Ly, Dai, and Nhan. DPM Khiem said he would discuss these issues with the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). The Ambassador encouraged the DPM to do so, saying that he also intends to raise individual cases and our general concerns directly with the MPS.

PEACE CORPS, NEW EMBASSY: NEED GVN RESPONSE  
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110. (SBU) The Ambassador told Khiem that, in his view, we are not that far from agreement on opening a Peace Corps program in Vietnam. A number of senior Vietnamese leaders have told him that they want to see this happen, he noted. The problems appear when we attempt to engage on technical details. The Ambassador said we would be working with the Ministry of Education and Training on this issue, and DPM Khiem said he would also try to move the process along on the Vietnamese side.

111. (SBU) We have similar problems with regard to a New Embassy Compound, the Ambassador told DPM Khiem; there has been much work by both sides but we still have not closed a deal. We need, in particular, a counter-offer on price from the Vietnamese side to move towards an agreement. The DPM said he agreed that the United States needs a new embassy that reflects the growing relationship. The Ambassador added the Embassy is still adding staff, and thanked the MFA for moving quickly to provide accreditation. Ultimately we would like more of our diplomats to study Vietnamese in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the Ambassador added, which will require Vietnam to begin issuing visas to these students; the DPM said he supported

this idea.

#### CONSULATES, CONSULAR DISTRICT ISSUES

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¶12. (SBU) We are also seriously considering opening a consulate in Danang, the Ambassador said, a small post to serve the important central coast region that does not get the attention it deserves from the United States. We would also welcome, in principle, Vietnam's interest in opening new consulates in the United States. DPM Khiem said Vietnam is considering changes, including possibly moving its Consulate General in San Francisco to Los Angeles, and may open new consulates in either Houston and Chicago. The Ambassador said we will be happy to discuss the details when Vietnam is ready.

¶13. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that in Vietnam we cover the day-to-day work in the southern half of the country from our Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). Occasionally, however, local officials interfere when consulate officers work outside HCMC itself. This is an issue that also affects other diplomatic missions in Vietnam and, while it has not so far been a serious issue, it could become a major problem if consulate officers were denied access to a region during a crisis or natural disaster.

#### UNSC: AREAS FOR COOPERATION, JOINT STUDY

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¶14. (SBU) Turning to Vietnam's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, DPM Khiem said Vietnam has been preparing for this role. The Ambassador noted the UNSC will be deeply engaged on difficult issues such as North Korea, Iran, Burma and Sudan and that we look forward to working closely with Hanoi in this arena. Khiem responded that Vietnam's positions are actually quite close to those of the United States on many major issues, such as dealing with North Korea.

¶15. (SBU) One possible way to improve our understanding of these and other issues could be joint studies on various topics by our offices that do policy and planning, the DPM suggested. The Ambassador agreed that having experts share ideas privately and informally could be very useful over time. Improving the training of its diplomats is a major priority of the MFA, DPM Khiem said, and this could also involve exchanges with U.S. experts in that field.

¶16. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's question, the DPM said it is likely that Vice Foreign Minister Le Cong Phung will take the job as the next Ambassador to the United States despite issues with Vietnam's age regulations preventing service beyond 60 at the vice

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ministerial level. The government is trying to reinvigorate its leadership, getting younger people into more senior positions, but there must be exceptions to the rules. The Prime Minister is now considering a recommendation by the MFA that the age limit for ambassadors should be raised to 65 in certain circumstances.

¶17. (SBU) The Ambassador said our two nations have a good dialogue on terrorism, though Vietnam could still do more to protect its commercial banks from illicit use. The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism launched by Presidents Bush and Putin now has 51 partner nations and we believe Vietnam should become a partner as well. In addition, we are working to improve safety at Vietnam's research reactor at Dalat by converting it from highly-enriched to low-enriched uranium. We and the Russians are also willing to remove spent uranium from the site at no cost, and we are discussing this with the Ministry of Science and Technology. DPM Khiem responded that Vietnam's policy is that nuclear technology should only be used for peaceful purposes, so the GVN would like to cooperate on this issue.

#### LEGACY ISSUES

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¶18. (SBU) On dioxin, the Ambassador said that, while we have made

much progress in broadening our bilateral dialogue on this issue over three years, it is important now to find effective ways to spend the USD three million recently appropriated by Congress in order to produce concrete results. We will remain engaged in helping people who have disabilities regardless of the cause, but this should not be held out as an obligation or directly tied to "Agent Orange." Similarly on unexploded ordnance, we have a budget of USD 3.6 million this year but that will decrease over time, so the money must be used more efficiently and new donors must be engaged.

¶19. (SBU) DCM Khiem pointed out that we have seen great progress on MIA issues. The Ambassador said this move was well received, and noted the USNS Bruce Heezen will visit Danang in October for a meteorological mission, but that we hope it can also contribute eventually to the fullest accounting mission by demonstrating new capabilities to conduct underwater searches.

#### NONLETHAL DEFENSE ARTICLES

¶20. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that he had met with Minister of Defense Phung Quang Thanh earlier in the week, and they had agreed that the relationship is moving in the right direction on mil-to-mil issues. However, since President Bush decided in December 2006 that Vietnam could buy nonlethal defense articles, no requests for purchases have been received. In FY2009 there may be up to USD one million available for military equipment-related grants, but we need to show some activity to get things started. DPM Khiem said this could be discussed in connection with a possible visit to the United States by Defense Minister Thanh.

#### COMMENT

¶21. (SBU) Pham Gia Khiem, who has just been reappointed as Foreign Minister, in addition to his position as deputy prime minister, seems set to continue leading the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the immediate future. Reports of personnel changes, however, imply that he will give up the subordinate position at some point in the future. The DPM was in his usual form, jovial and focused, but not in command of detail in all areas.

#### MARINE